

State-sponsored hate speech and disinformation against the Bahá'í Community in Iran

Background

In recent years, the government-sponsored campaign of hatred against the Bahá'ís in Iran has been on the rise in all media platforms, including radio, newspapers, television and social media. Every month, hundreds of anti-Bahá'í articles and videos are published in Iran.

Since 2017, more than 33,000 pieces of anti-Bahá'í content have been published or broadcast. In recent years, hundreds of websites and dozens of social media accounts have systematically attacked the Bahá'í Faith.

History shows that persecution can escalate to the most grievous crimes in a climate of propaganda, disinformation and hatred.

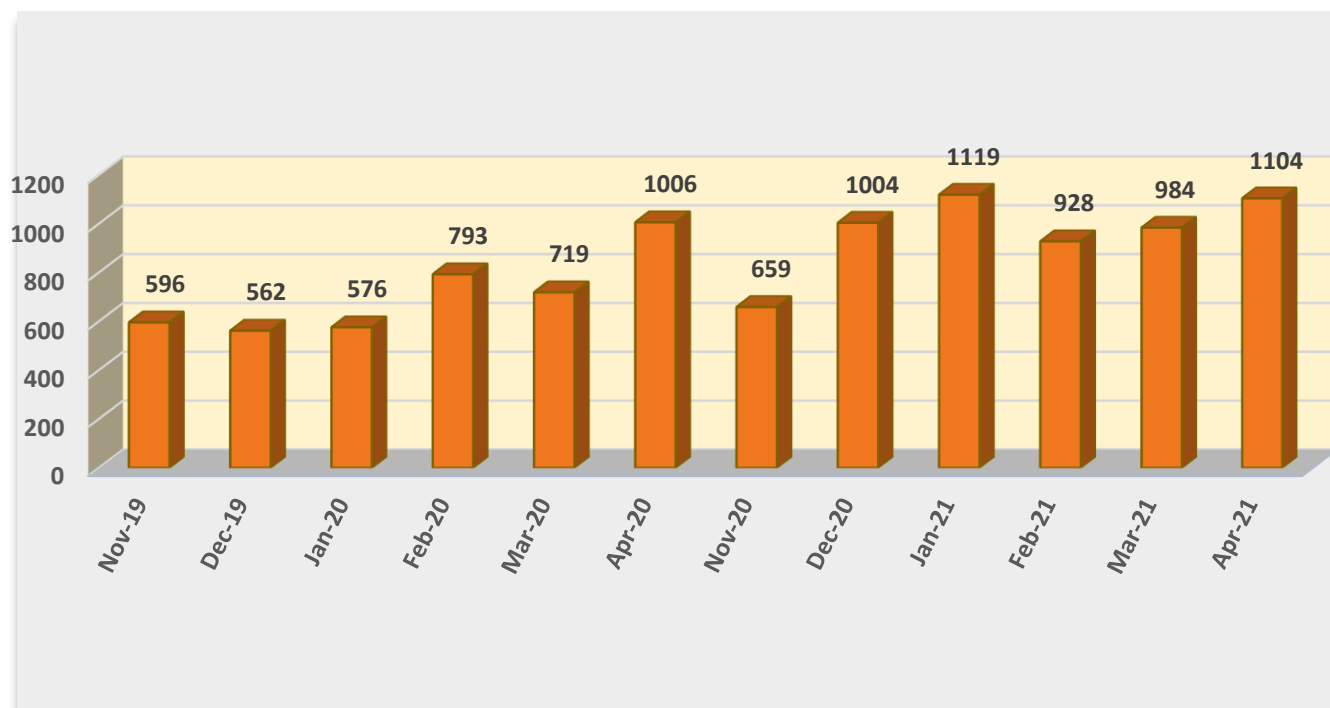
The purpose of spreading and disseminating this false information and hateful propaganda is to demonize and vilify Bahá'ís with the aim of provoking public hatred against them on a daily basis.

Bahá'ís in Iran are not given the right to reply to any of these baseless accusations, either in the media or via any other outlet.

Disinformation on the rise

While disinformation against Bahá'ís has been a policy of the regime and consistent in the last 42 years, a comparative analysis demonstrates a 36% increase in the amount of anti-Bahá'í content (articles and media) between the six months of November – December 2020 and January-April 2021 in comparison to November-December 2019 and January – April 2020.

Anti-Baha'i Articles / Videos in Media - 2019-2021



Manipulated images

Provided below are a few examples, of many, which depict the way in which images are distorted and disseminated on the internet and social media by individuals, organizations and groups associated with Iranian authorities. The images of concern are labeled 'FALSE'.

Symbol of 'the Greatest Name'

The Bahá'í symbol of 'the Greatest Name' is a highly sacred and revered symbol for Bahá'ís and a reference to God. In the image below (left), the symbol has been desecrated. A true version is offered on the right.

This symbol is equivalent to the Holy Cross in Christianity and Allah in Islam.

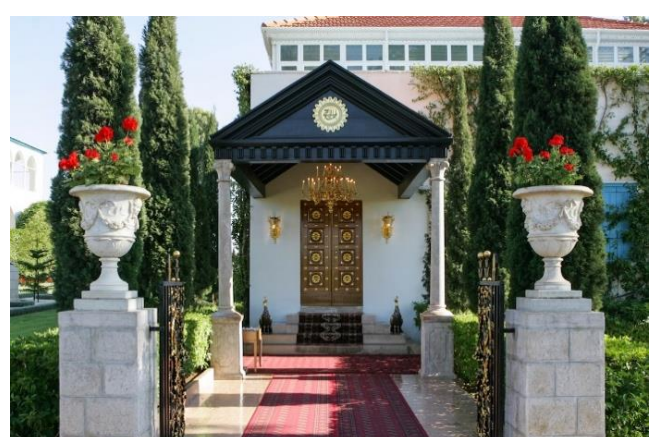


Photo of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh

For Bahá'ís around the world, the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh is regarded as one of the most holy places in the world. It is where the remains of Bahá'u'lláh, the Prophet Founder of the Bahá'í Faith is buried and is a point of devotion for prayers. It was recognized in 2008 by UNESCO as a World Heritage site, possessing "outstanding universal value."

The image on the left has been distorted showing a cult worshiper bowing before blazing tombstones superimposed in front of a picture of the entrance to the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh.

The Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh is as sacred to Bahá'ís as Kaaba is to the Muslims and the Church of Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem to the Christians. A true photograph of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh is on the right.



Posts on social media

Dozens of YouTube, Instagram, and Telegram channels host anti-Bahá'í content that is intended to perpetuate disinformation and hatred.

When anti-Bahá'í content is posted to Instagram accounts, some of them are shut down under the company's user guidelines. Often the content will again reappear with new user names.

As an example, referring to Bahá'ís as British spies has been a tactic used by the ruling Clerics in Iran and authorities for decades to incite anti-Bahá'í sentiments, capitalizing on the geo-political sensitivities in the region to arouse suspicion and hatred towards the Bahá'ís.

Following his Father's passing, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'u'lláh's son, had a leadership role in the Bahá'í Faith. 'Abdu'l-Bahá received a knighthood for his humanitarian efforts in helping to relieve distress and famine for those in Haifa and 'Akká, as well as the neighbouring areas, during the famine years of 1914-1918.

The image on the left, not included, is one example of a post on Instagram which insinuates that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was a spy for the United Kingdom as the basis for why he was knighted.

A true photograph of 'Abdu'l-Bahá receiving recognition for his humanitarian work is on the right.

Due to the highly offensive nature of this image, it has not been included.



Websites

Websites dedicated to amplifying derogatory images that demonize and dehumanize Bahá'ís are developed by individuals and Iranian authorities. There are thousands of examples of anti-Bahá'í materials in circulation, often shared via government-sponsored or pro-government websites, in addition to social media platforms.

A cursory search of these materials points to more than 100 separate websites hosting anti-Bahá'í content. These websites include the [Ministry of Culture and Guidance](#), the semi-official [Kayhan](#) news site, and the personal websites of clerics like [Ayatollah Safi Golpaygani](#) and [Ayatollah Subairi Zanjani](#) – along with other news sites and propaganda outlets.

There are also vast online libraries containing hundreds of anti-Bahá'í books claiming to be objective research into the Bahá'í Faith, but which have the aim of distorting Bahá'í history and beliefs.

Many videos and documentary programs are filled with baseless accusations against Bahá'ís and false information about Bahá'í beliefs and the Bahá'í community, which are produced with the aim to misleading the public about the Bahá'ís.

Examples of images, as provided below, include those accusing Bahá'ís of practicing witchcraft and further drawing on disrespectful usage of sacred Christian and Jewish images and symbols.

These are commonly-used images that present the Bahá'í Faith as “satanic” or “deviant,” or as agents or spies for Israel and Western countries.



Further examples of hate propaganda

The [‘Archives of Bahá’í Persecution in Iran’](#) website, developed by the [Bahá’í International Community](#), offers further and numerous examples of hate propaganda directed towards the Bahá’ís.

Hyperlinked examples of hate speech, slander and fabricated assertions against the Bahá’ís which are archived online are listed below:

- [Accusations against the Bahá’í Faith or community in the media](#)
- [Anti-Bahá’í videos](#)
- [Exhibitions](#)
- [Fatwas](#)
- [Graffiti](#)
- [Religious Authorities](#)

Implications of hate propaganda

This rise in hate propaganda is part of the four-decade-long, government-led effort to arouse feelings of suspicion, distrust, and hatred for the Bahá’í population of Iran.

A [study](#) of thousands of pieces of anti-Bahá’í propaganda found that nearly every article surveyed misrepresents Bahá’í beliefs in a manner designed to cause maximum offence to Iran’s Muslim majority population.

The purpose of spreading and disseminating this false information and hateful propaganda is to demonize and vilify Bahá’ís, and provoke public hatred, violence – and [even murder](#) – by their neighbours and fellow citizens. Under these circumstances, the oppression is presently unfolding with [greater intensity](#). This campaign of hate propaganda has led to acts of violence against the Bahá’ís, carried out with complete impunity.

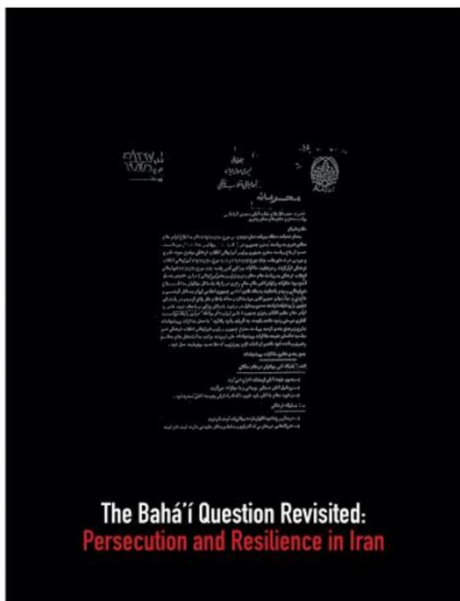
History has shown that the hatred of an entire population can be stirred up by such a relentless, systematic repetition of falsehoods and myths. When aroused citizens take violent action against their neighbours – whom they have been repeatedly told are traitors, corrupt or unclean – the offending authorities can absolve themselves of responsibility by blaming the actions on the populace.

Despite [routine denials by Iranian officials](#), the government's 40-year, systematic persecution of its Bahá'í citizens has been [well documented](#), offering facts that prove Iran's violations of international law with respect to guarantees of religious freedom – along with violations of legal due process and other basic human rights that have touched not only Iranian Bahá'ís but many other Iranian citizens.

Further online reading



[‘Inciting Hatred: Iran’s Media Campaign to Demonize Bahá’ís’, Bahá’í International Community \(2011\)](#)



[‘The Bahá’í Question Revisited: Persecution and Resilience in Iran’, Bahá’í International Community \(2016\)](#)